Araştırma Makalesi
Research Article

ISSN 2548-0502

söylem
FİLOLOJİ DERGİSİ

2022; *7(1):* 68-93

Unsettling Things: Vladimir Mayakovsky and Marina Tsvetaeva's Attachment to Everyday Objects

DR. ÖĞRETİM ÜYESİ **MELİH LEVİ***

Abstract

This article offers a comparative literary analysis of the representations of everyday life and objects in poetic works by the Russian poets Vladimir Mayakovsky and Marina Tsvetaeva. *Byt (быть)*, a concept that refers to quotidian practices and the hardened routines of everyday life, has been used to understand the manner of Russian writers' negotiations with everyday reality. After surveying some prominent scholarly views on *byt*, this article assesses the legacy of impressionism with particular attention to how it informs aesthetic representations of the everyday. Since impressionism provided stylistic foundations for many modernist and avant-garde movements, a critical assessment of its legacy proves useful for understanding the affective and aesthetic orientations developed toward everyday objects in works by Mayakovsky and Tsvetaeva. An investigation of how both poets transfigure everyday objects and invest them with spiritual significance reveals the nature of their attachment to objects. The article pays particular attention to how the poets resist Marxian notions of fetishism by translating their objectual negotiations into a constructivist process for the poetic self. As part of this process of self-fashioning, the poets develop novel ways of reorganizing the everyday through a subversion of the metonymic and metaphorical axes of description. The article then offers detailed analyses of Mayakovsky's play, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* (Трагедия, 1913), and Tsvetaeva's poem, "Desk" (Стол, 1933). In both, everyday objects become thresholds of intersubjectivity. They are at once autonomous entities and metonymic projections of the poets' bodies. Compared to Mayakovsky's restless prophetic voice, which orchestrates ritualistic performances for objectual presentations of his body and psyche, Tsvetaeva's poem seeks more absorbed and intimate immersion in her object, the writing table, which records traces of an embodied poetic self and its struggle to restructure cultural constructions of the everyday.

Keywords: Vladimir Mayakovsky, Marina Tsvetaeva, poetry, Russian modernism, futurism, imagery

VLADİMİR MAYAKOVSKİ VE MARİNA TSVETAYEVA'NIN GÜNDELİK HAYATIN NESNELERİYLE İLİŞKİLERİNİN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI İNCELEMESİ

Öz

Bu makalede, Rus şairler Vladimir Mayakovski ve Marina Tsvetayeva'nın eserlerinde gündelik yaşamın ve nesnelerin temsili karşılaştırmalı analiz yöntemiyle incelenmektedir.

* Boğaziçi Ün. Fen-Edebiyat Fak. Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları, melih.levi@boun.edu.tr, orcid: 0000-0002-0485-0024
Gönderim Tarihi: 19.02.2022 Kabul Tarihi: 29.03.2022

Gündelik pratikleri ve hayatın katılaşmış rutinlerini ifaden eden *bıt' (быть)*, Rus yazarların gündelik gerçeklikle kurduğu ilişkileri anlamak için kullanılmış bir kavramdır. *Bıt'* hakkında çeşitli akademik görüşler incelendikten sonra, izlenimciliğin mirasının gündelik hayatın estetik temsilini nasıl şekillendirdiği ele alınmaktadır. İzlenimcilik, birçok modernist ve avangard hareket için biçimsel temeller oluşturduğundan, mirasının eleştirel bir değerlendirmesi, Mayakovski ve Tsvetayeva'nın eserlerinde gündelik nesnelere karşı geliştirilen duygusal ve estetik yönelimlerin açıklanmasında faydalı olacaktır. Her iki şairin gündelik nesneleri nasıl dönüştürdükleri ve onlara nasıl manevi anlamlar yüklediklerini incelerken, makale, şairlerin nesnel dünya ile kurduğu ilişkilerin benlik inşasındaki etkilerinin izini sürmektedir. Bu süreçte, şairler, dilin metonimik ve metaforik eksenlerini yeniden şekillendirerek gündelik hayatı yeniden düzenlemenin yollarını ararlar. Makalenin ikinci bölümünde, Mayakovski'nin tiyatro oyunu *Vladimir Mayakovsky: Bir Trajedi* (Трагедия, 1913)'nin ve Tsvetayeva'nın "Masa" (Стол, 1933) adlı şiirinin ayrıntılı analizleri sunulmaktadır. Her iki eserde gündelik nesneler âdeta bir eşik konumundadır hem özerkliklerini ilan ederler hem de şairlerin vücutsal ve tinsel yansımalarıdır. Mayakovski'nin huzursuz ve kehanetler sunan kahramanı, benliğinin nesnel izdüşümleri için sembolik ritüeller düzenlerken, Tsvetayeva'nın nesnelerle kurguladığı ilişkilerde daha tekil ve samimi bir dinamik söz konusudur. Onun nesnesi, hem düşünsel hem de fiziksel mücadelesine şahitlik eden yazı masasıdır. Tsvetayeva, bu masayla kurduğu çetrefilli ilişki üzerinden gündelik hayat olgusunu oluşturan kültürel temelleri ve toplumsal koşulları görünür kılmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Vladimir Mayakovsky, Marina Tsvetaeva, şiir, Rus modernizmi, fütürizm, imge

INTRODUCTION

Mayakovsky is often associated with the cubist and futurist movements. Some prominent stylistic grounds for this association include the gestural and embodied projection of his poetic voice, the speedy pace of his transitions between imagery, his use of fragmentation, constructivist montage, and mechanistic. In her essay "Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism," Olga Rozanova compares the three different art schools based on their representations of objects. She explains that cubist artists "distorted form out of all proportion not because they aspired to free themselves from nature, but because they aspired to convey her as fully as possible. In this sense Cubism is the climax to the adoration of the object" (2000, p. 108). Indeed, Mayakovsky transfigures objects with such radical intensity that his attachment to them takes the form of a fetishistic compulsion. Marina Tsvetaeva performs a similar urgency of attachment to mundane objects and eventually discovers that the construction of poetic identity depends on the relationship between these everyday objects and the self. Where Mayakovsky challenges our sense of the everyday through a perpetual fragmentation of the ordinary into rebellious and dissenting fractions of the psyche, Tsvetaeva imagines her artistic transfiguration through objects by making them intimate witnesses of the quotidian toils and gendered pressures of the artistic process.

In this paper, I turn to Mayakovsky's play *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* and Tsvetaeva's poem "Desk" to analyze their relationship to everyday objects.[1] At first glance, their interest in topics such as labor, construction, and alienation recall Marxian notions of fetishism. By maintaining a constructivist attitude in their poetic production, however, they interrupt the prevailing logics of fetishism, meanwhile also deconstructing the process through which claims of artistic unity emerge. For both poets, this restless relationship to objects becomes a vehicle for interrogating the artistic process and artistic identity. In "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," Marx describes fetishism as the process "which attaches itself to the product of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities" (2011, p. 83). Our daily relationship to objects tends to lose sight of the labor and structural processes which undergird their production, relating to them primarily as commodities and through the comparative values they acquire in various markets. Both Mayakovsky and Tsvetaeva's insistence on transfiguring and ventriloquizing everyday objects reflects an anxiety about the reception of their own artistic creations. Hence, this poetic fetish with objects also serves as a vehicle for the process of artistic self-fashioning. The hyperbolic spiritualization of everyday objects and quotidian life turns into a metaphor for the constructivist process behind poetic creation.

More importantly, like the spiritual bend in Marx's language on object fetishism, these poets' engagement with objects acquires religious or spiritual dimensions. In Mayakovsky, objects are habitually caught in liminal states between their mundane everyday existence and the poet's restless desire to locate in them some larger, more profound meaning. While describing this oscillation, Mayakovsky's dramatic figures find themselves in crises of self-definition. What is the role of the poet in modern society, and can poetic speech still embody a prophetic potential? In Tsvetaeva, we see a more sustained attachment to objects with longer temporality, often borrowing from the language of romance, devotional contemplation, and erotic intimacy. Therefore, in comparison to Mayakovsky's urban and oracular voice, Tsvetaeva's more intimate address-poems probe into discursive relations between object attachment and amorous co-existence. Ultimately, her poetry also exposes the affective processes behind the labor of artistic construction.

EVERYDAY LIFE, BYT, AND POETIC TRANSFIGURATION

I wish to start by considering two concepts which will be useful in appreciating the poets' transfiguring descriptions of everyday life. The first is the Russian word *byt*, which relates to the experience of everyday life, and the second is the impressionist backdrop which served as a departure point for the aesthetic ambitions of many avant-garde movements such as Cubism and Futurism. Since Mayakovsky's earliest poems such as "Night" (1912) demonstrate obvious impressionist attitudes, a discussion of the novelties and innovations of an impressionist style will

[1] I am indebted to Catherine Ciepiela and Laure A. Katsaros for introducing me to these poets. I wish to thank Ilya Kiselev and Timothy Yuan for their help with Russian pronunciation and etymology. Finally, I extend my gratitude to the peer reviewer for their truly valuable suggestions.

provide a stronger basis for understanding the performative, prophetic, and mechanistic imagery in his later works.

'Byt' which etymologically stems from the verb for 'to be,' serves as a central term in discussions of everyday life in the Russian literary tradition. Roman Jakobson tasks this word with establishing a powerful tension between creative transformation and stasis. On one side is the "poet's revolutionary call" for change, a reaching out toward an uncertain future where the existing dynamics will find alteration (1987, p. 277). On the other side is the resistance of the present against any kind of change: "An immutable present, overlaid… by a stagnating slime, which stiles life in its tight, hard mold" (1987, p. 277) The word *byt* refers to that latter force which conveys a static, unchanging, and hackneyed sense of the everyday. It is important to note that Jakobson ascribes a great deal of agency to this concept: It is not simply a state of being or emotion. Rather, it has a certain overpowering effect on the creative and poetic urge to restructure the world in language. That is why Mayakovsky often revolts against the present state of things, to shock things out of their ordinary existence, and to dynamize poetic language with the capacity to make new versions of everyday existence imaginable.

Svetlena Boym works with Jakobson's concept to compare this resistant force of *byt* to the perhaps more alluring or generative effects of nostalgia: "It is a tantalizing presence of omnipotent ordinariness in its most static and conservative forms, pettiness, philistinism, and slime, that are all too real to inspire any nostalgia" (2018, p. 72). She also discusses this overpowering *byt* in relation to the metaphorical impulse of poetry: "This uncontrollable sphere of everyday practices and ordinary routines resists both political change and poetic metaphorization" (2018, p. 73). The metonymic impulse in poetry may at first appear to be more in synch with *byt,* since metonymy often entails the listing of objects with emerge from mutual contexts. In so doing, metonymy affirms and reinforces the physical settings or contexts that hold certain entities in a relationship. However, such traditional accounts of metaphor and metonymy, which ascribe imaginative novelty to the former and contextual integrity to the latter, run into serious limitations. Mayakovsky's verse is rich in both modes but in a way that purposefully subverts their expected usage.

For example, in *A Tragedy,* his metaphors are often so hyperbolic and melodramatic that they call attention to the illusory freedoms or possibilities enacted by metaphors. Rather than liberating concepts through newly imagined relationships, Mayakovsky's metaphors serve more as self-consciousness portraits of a mind which is struggling to disturb *byt* out of its traditional structure. Mayakovsky's metonymic structures, in contrast, acquire more agency and distorting potential because Mayakovsky exhausts the mechanism of metonymic substitution. Rather than producing a clear context from which objects are drawn, his metonymies render all possible context and background evasive and unstable. In *A Tragedy,* the various characters serve as metonymic extensions of the suffering poet's body or psyche. But any correlation between the characters and the poet proves difficult to make because the actors, in turn, also carry objects which delineate the specific part of the body that they are meant to represent. As such, in Mayakovsky's poetry, metaphors and metonymies often subvert traditional rhetorical expectations. The manner of the

breakdown of their supposed rhetorical functions serves as a guide for evaluating the stakes of Mayakovsky's process of transfiguration. As Jane Gallop argues, "[a]ny polar opposition between metaphor and metonymy (vertical versus horizontal, masculine versus feminine) is trapped in the imaginary order, subject to the play of identification and rivalry." (1985, p. 132).

When considered from the perspective of the breakdown in metaphor and metonymy, the conceptual horizon of *byt* grows and allows for a larger spectrum of affective responses. This is similar to the aesthetic category of the sublime which is often studied in dualistic and gendered terms that limit the variety of affects and states of responsiveness that might inhere in the actual experience of the sublime. Likewise, while Jakobson's dualistic categories render visible dynamics of everyday life that are ubiquitous across the literary tradition, his characterization of *byt* limits the variety of attitudes and affects that might be cultivated in response to this seemingly static state of things in the present. Benjamin M. Sutcliffe calls attention to the limitations that result from the dualistic conceptualizations of *byt* and, in particular, from the association of the *byt* with the female: "Both female activities and *byt* as their temporal context chronically escape notice: the everyday is omnipresent yet unnoticed" (2009, p. 7). In addition to signifying the seemingly unchangeable structure of the everyday, *byt* therefore also carries a phenomenological dimension and is capable of disclosing certain thresholds of responsiveness.

When poetic texts insist on the quotidian and render the logics of the everyday into poetic discourse, they defamiliarize the familiar. This traditional narrative of defamiliarization, however, may have its own limits unless complemented with a rigorous analysis of self-fashioning. Otherwise, we would be working with idealized notions of the quotidian as presenting itself without any intentionality. Bill Brown explains this issue in his influential account, "Thing Theory": "The question is less about 'what things are for a given society' than about what claims on your attention and on your action are made on behalf of things." (2001, p. 9-10). As such, any analysis of the changing configurations or reimaginations of the quotidian requires attention to how "meaning emerges in the dialectical play between subject and object, each transforming the other" (Knapp and Pence, 2003, p. 663).

Impressionist art is situated at this very threshold. It articulates an awareness of the existence of this dialectic without being able to perform or dramatize it. As Hermann Bahr argues, "… the Impressionist wants to catch, when the impression that we receive startles our activity, but our advancing activity has influenced and transformed that impression. A moment sooner and intuition would be blind. It only becomes vision when it has been breathed upon by thought" (1925, p. 46). Modernist and avant-garde movements after impressionism respond to its invitation to reorganize perception and to challenge conventional ways of seeing. However, they also confront Impressionism's legacy by dramatizing what happens to the perceiving self in the process. In other words, rather than disclosing the subjective organization of a given scene, they narrativize and dramatize the act of seeing through more dialectical configurations of the subject and the object perceived.

This aesthetic paradigm is important for an assessment of Mayakovsky and Tsvetaeva because they too naturally encountered the pervasive legacy of Impressionism during their

formative years. Vladimir Markov shows that "[s]ome futurist poets began their artistic careers as impressionistic artists; what is more important, many of them at first preferred to apply the term 'impressionist' to literary production as well" (1968, p. 3). This meant, however, that now the subjective part of the dialectic – especially in the lyric mode could receive exaggerated emphasis. As Markov further demonstrates, "If one stresses 'I' rather than 'see' in 'as I see it,' objectivity is in danger. It is this subjective emphasis that usually characterizes impressionism in Literature" (1968, p. 4).

Mayakovsky's hyperbolic, declamatory performances and prophetic voice can be seen as symptoms of this extreme privileging of the subjective in the literary manifestations of impressionist sensibility. Nevertheless, the constant frustration of the self-fashioning attempts of Mayakovsky's speakers also serves as a critical commentary on this dialectic. Mayakovsky explores the possibility of a revolutionary drama and poetry that can resist reification. In his assessment of the shortcomings and afterlives of impressionism, Theodor Adorno observes that "[a]ll modern art after impressionism, probably including even the radical manifestations of expressionism, has abjured the semblance of a continuum grounded in the unity of subjective experience" (2002, p. 155) Similarly, Mayakovsky's agitated protestations against *byt* are not solely attempts to transfigure the stagnant compositions of the present. It entails performing versions of himself that can be transfigured along with that present. Hence, just as in his poetry, in *A Tragedy*, there is a great spectrum of affective dispositions. As James H. McGavran notes, "[h]is lyrical alter ego alternates between spitting in the public's face and begging for attention and understanding, between wreaking bloody revenge on his enemies and saving the entire world through his enormous capacity for suffering. He is presented as the most lonely, misunderstood hero in the world, and yet also a successful ringleader and member of the victorious collective" (2013, xx).

Tsvetaeva's engagement with *byt* clearly demonstrates an awareness of the gendered constructions of this concept. For example, in her *Moscow Diaries*, Tsvetaeva writes: "We come closer: hills and waves of sacks, in between them sighs, scarves, backs. There are almost no men: in the Revolution, as always, the weight of everyday life falls on women: previously – in sheaves – now in sacks. (Everyday life is a sack: with holes. And you carry it anyway.)" (2002, p. 40). While describing how the burden of everyday life during the Revolution falls on women, Tsvetaeva subverts the metaphorical and metonymic dimensions of language to enact the ways in which women disappear into discourse. For example, here the language moves in and out of the metaphorical register of geography and a mountain landscape to describe the sacks carried on the backs of women. She then makes a metonymic incision into this metaphorical landscape, now forcing reality into metaphor and listing the parts or aspects of women who appear in between the sacks through their "sighs, scares, backs." Tsvetaeva subverts the more conventional or Romantic notions of everyday life as that which magically disappears, instead framing it as a weight which scars the backs of women, who disappear in discourse along with the quotidian. The final epigrammatic statement at the end of the entry embodies this duality: She carries the weight of everyday life in the most difficult of conditions, despite a knowledge that some of its contents will inevitably escape and overflow. She knows that it is going to be those escaped items which will

prove most interesting to male writers and provide the bases of her objectification in cultural discourse.

On one hand, this kind of awareness of the body, what it endures, the marks and the scars it carries, are mainstays of Tsvetaeva's poetic imagery. On the other hand, her poetry strives for a higher, spiritual unity with her objects. Unlike Mayakovsky's rapid movements between a multiplicity of objects, Tsvetaeva enacts transfigurations which preserve a sense of mutuality and intimacy. Her statement that "the bone is too bony, the spirit is too spiritual" (Crone, p. 162) represents the liminal state in which Tsvetaeva's poetry often dwells. Or as Josephine von Zitzewitz puts it, "The lonely figure of the poet… is portrayed as a rebel opposing *byt,* nitty-gritty of everyday life, in favor of *bytie*, the spiritual aspects of existence. Her art takes the poet to a plane between this world and another, alienating her from her surroundings without allowing full access to the next world." (2008, p. 450) In comparing the two poets, I will be interested in the differences in their manner of spiritualization of the quotidian. While Mayakovsky initiates this process through performative masks (the suffering prophet) and ritualistic events (ritual of sacrifice), Tsvetaeva realizes spiritual dynamics through a contemplative, intimate, and radical immersion in her objects.

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY*: A TRAGEDY*

In *A Tragedy,* Mayakovsky externalizes particular physical and psychic features of his poetic persona through various characters, who are in turn represented by objects. Robert Payne describes the nature of the relationship between Mayakovsky and these dramatized extensions: "Most of the characters, even those who offer tribute to Mayakovsky, were Mayakovsky. The Man Without a Head, the Man with One Ear … were all Mayakovsky in his various manifestations, and there is some question whether The Enormous Woman, fifteen to twenty feet tall, was not a projection of the Mayakovsky who in his final appearance wishes he had breasts large enough to feed everyone" (1995, p. 3). Therefore, from the outset of the play, dynamics of embodiment and disembodiment come to the fore. These characters are projections of the poet's body, except the metonymic relationship concerning parts and wholes is not one-directional. The characters carry their own metonymic projections as emblems of identity as well. Despite the constant visual reminder of their relations, however, they have distinct mannerisms and voices, often revealing the degree of the poet's alienation from his own existence, both to the audience and to the poet himself. More importantly, they engender a political drama regarding the extent of the authority Mayakovsky can claim to have over the various parts of his dramatic creation.

The play begins with a prologue by the titular character, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and ends with an epilogue, which heroically announces a successful fulfillment of the poet's melodramatic on-stage construction. In the space between, Mayakovsky repeatedly refers to himself as the 'thing,' the concrete object in perpetual formation: "Patch up my soul / so the emptiness can't leak out" (1968, p. 23). These declarations convey the tragic poet's anxious needs to keep producing concrete versions of himself, objective correlatives which can ascribe some significance to his seemingly hollow existence. Mayakovsky imagines himself as empty space, a blank canvas, a field

that longs to be filled. The constructivist process is conveyed by the act of "sewing" which assumes that there is an *other* involved in the process of creation, that the poetic self is being sutured piece by piece by the other observant gaze of another entity. When Mayakovsky addresses the audience directly, this other becomes the audience, whose presence makes the poet aware of having to cater to common and established tastes of urban audiences.

The metaphors adorning Mayakovsky's speech are consistent with this two-sided relationship, of one who authors himself into existence and who knows that he is being objectified and crafted by an external agent: "Today I'm getting married, and I'm Marrying Madness," declares Mayakovsky (2018, p. 16). The sentence is in the reflexive, showing how Mayakovsky imagines himself as the other. These self-reflexive metaphors for his impending union with his own self are consistent with Robert Payne's analysis of how each actor in the play works as a representation of the poet. The characters are all associated with distinctive features: One has a single ear, the other "cries ordinary tears," the other "cries little tiny tears," there is a man with "scrawny black cats," and another man "with one eye and one leg" (Mayakovsky, 2018, p. 8). These features, then, are signaled through objects carried by the characters in their hands upon entering the stage. This representational regime, where each character comes to depend on objectual projections of their identity, transfigures both the characters and the objects. The objects are removed from their everyday contexts. On stage, they are not only parts of quotidian life or extensions of the body; they are now bearers of unique dramatic identities. The actors, in turn, often appear like objectual entities, even automatons that appear on the stage to fulfill their assigned functions.

In the original Russian, the act of getting married is conveyed by the phrase, "я овенчаюсь моим безумием" (Mayakovsky, 1914, p. 19). "овенчаться" comes from the verb 'to crown.' Since the verb is in the reflexive, Schmidt's choice - "to marry" – conveys the grammatical intentions of the original. (2018, p. 18). However, Schmidt's translation loses an important religious significance: "овенчаюсь" can have a religious connotation because it literally means to 'put on a wreath,' referring to the crown of thorns. Guy Daniels's choice to use "crown myself" (1968, p. 23) preserves the religious connotation, which become seven more important as the ritualistic and sacrificial narrative threads thicken in the rest of the play. The play comes to have significant religious undertones with Mayakovsky dressing himself as the center of all suffering and the companion of the poor, just as he uses crucifixion elsewhere as a central motif for the hyperbolic representations of his anguished characters. In light of the pervasive religious symbolism, the self-reflexive act of crowning acquires spiritual significance. Schmidt's translation replicates the typographic choices in Mayakovsky's original, with the capitalization of "M" for both "Marrying and Madness," making it appear as if the words themselves are in some kind of partnership (2018, p. 18). In the original, however, the last letter of the sentence, the "M," is written in large font. This typographic detail is important, as it is a play on Mayakovsky's own name. The noun "madness" itself is being crowned by the typographic edit, and the repetitions of letter "m" (моим безумием) echo the three "M"s in the poet's full name (Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky) as well as his obsession with forming concrete representations of the self through mechanistic verbal gestures.

In *Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist Vision,* Juliet Stapanian describes the Cubist concept of the opened form as "the freeing of imagery from conventional vanishing-point perspective, the dislocation and fragmentation of objects onto the surface of the canvas" (1986, p. 10). She refers to this concept of the opened form while analyzing Mayakovsky's poem, "I": "In the displaced single eye – like the 'I' of the persona - appears the anxiety of urban life and the alienation of a vulnerable sensitivity … Exposed to everything and projected in to everything, he is the ultimate opened form" (1986, p. 170). The combination of "exposure and projection" that Stapanian describes here is at the center of Mayakovsky's poetic project. In "I," Mayakovsky crucifies a policeman, standing at the crossroads and imagines tall buildings hanging with "crooked necks." (2013, p. 39) The use of such distorted figures and subversive metaphors signals a desire to engender a new symbolic system and to make the heavy burden of urban experience more bearable for the psyche. In addition to this rebellious exposure, there is also projection in these lines. Mayakovsky creates a new image of the cityscape that organizes itself around the affective constitution of the subject. This tension between projection and exposure is also prevalent in *A Tragedy,* as Mayakovsky turns himself into an opened form. Urban life provides the foundation for this play. In fact, in the original production of the play, which featured Mayakovsky himself, the backdrop was a cubo-futurist painting by Iosif Shkolnik and Pavel Filonov (Warden, p. 53).

The ambivalence regarding the precise status of these characters lingers throughout the play. Who are they? Are they the poets' aesthetic creations, "children," (Mayakovsky, 2018, p. 14) imaginative projections? Are they parts of his body or psyche, threatening to overturn his authority? In his various apostrophic declarations, Mayakovsky ascribes these various possibilities to the characters. In so doing, he shifts the focus from the identity of these characters to their intentionality and fluctuating significance in the poet's volatile existence. This shift, in turn, creates a cycle, where the characters now grow anxious about their objectification and instrumentalization, forcing the poet into defensive diatribes. Therefore, given its ability to trace our changing responsiveness to a relatively stable and resistant set of quotidian relations, everyday life becomes philosophically charged "as… a site of otherness… as a site of possible ethical cultivation" (Jones, 2010, p. 282). As Stapanian argues, the 'not-I' or the 'you' is "inextricably linked to the concept of everyday life, or *byt*" (1986, p. 7). Though everyday life and quotidian objects may appear mundane, they are charged with subjective meaning. The tracing of this meaning proves especially challenging when objects are suspiciously absorbed, like escape artists, into the background of daily life. Mayakovsky finds something ominous or threatening in the automatization of our interactions with these everyday objects.

If we approach this play as an aesthetic manifesto or *ars poetica* of sorts, it is possible to understand why Mayakovsky burdens his characters with additional objectual representations. Why do these characters have to rely on the objects they carry to express their identity? By creating this mode of objectual dependency, Mayakovsky manages to maintain a strategic distance from the concretizing gravity of everyday existence. He is one step removed from the world of objects by making his primary interlocutors these dramatic entities. Jean Baudrillard argues that "[p]ossession cannot apply to an implement since the object I utilize always directs me back to the

world. Rather it applies to that object once it is divested of its function and made relative to a subject" (1997, p. 7). Characters in Mayakovsky's play also personalize things and revolt to that ascribed subjective meaning in a variety of ways. Some propose a more constructive relationship to things, while others are overcome by destructive urges. These disparities result in dissensus, a political disorder that also sets the stage for Mayakovsky's messianic declarations. Each character puts up a negotiation with their assigned object, and in doing so, provide the main character with a set of affective possibilities. When the various attitudes toward objects suggested by the characters prove irreconcilable, Mayakovsky steps in and exposes his crisis to the audience, painting himself as a tragic figure who is forced to seek impossible avenues of reconciliation in front of the expectant gaze of the audience.

One of the most important moments in the play comes in the first act with a debate between various characters about the status of things in their lives and their differing degrees of attachment to them. This debate catalogues the great spectrum of affective dispositions that Mayakovsky himself holds in store in his interactions with everyday objects. For instance, The Old Man with Cats proposes, "See what I mean! Things must be destroyed! I was right when I sensed the foe in their endearments" (Mayakovsky, 1968, p. 26). The original Russian here uses a heavy repetition of the "v" sound, which contributes to the resolute tone of the Old Man's speech. This is even more pronounced at the end when the reversed syntax (the declaration of the self, the "I" at the end) and the excessive repetition of the "r" sounds (*провидел* врага я!) introduce a rhythmic and brutal tone to his speech (Mayakovsky, 1914, p. 17). His desire for destroying things is emphasize through machine-like linguistic gestures. Appropriately, the next speaker, Man with a Long Face, questions whether one must show love to things (1968, p. 26). In contrast to the destructive proposal of the Old Man, his response is concentrated with the "sh" sounds and a repetition of "maybe" which conveys uncertainty. Likewise, the Man with one Arm wonders if they have been mistreating things all along, "Perhaps Things have different souls from ours" (1968, p. 26).

In response to this momentary guilt and sympathy with everyday objects, The Man with One Ear argues, "A good many Things are sewed inside out. Their hearts know no anger / They are deaf to wrath" (1968, p. 26). The original Russian of the second line deserves attention because Mayakovsky uses the words "Сердце" (heart) and "сердится" (anger, angry) (Mayakovsky, 1914, p. 17). The line can also be read as 'the heart knows no hearting; the heart doesn't know the act of being a heart.' This possibility further complicates the threshold between self and other, and between the animate and the inanimate. Though everyday objects are given sensibility, it is held to be of a different kind. The ambivalence about the status of objects within the world of human emotions echoes the previous speaker's belief that "[t]hings have different souls from ours" (1968, p. 26).

Finally, the Man with a Long Drawn-Out Face intervenes: "And in the place where a man's mouth is carved out, / Many things have an ear attached" (1968, p. 26). In the original Russian for the "carved mouth" (вырезан рот) (1914, p. 17) puts stress on the "r" sound. The brutal pronunciation reflects destructive urge and underscores the frustration that the characters have been building toward objects. Despite their perpetual frustration, however, they depend on the

objects to be able to convey their identities to the audience in the first place. The more these characters assign human abilities (sight, speech, hearing) to things, the more they grow conscious of their radical dependence on them. And when the objects do not respond back, they begin notice the degree of their alienation.

Mayakovsky interrupts this chaos and addresses the characters with a Christ-like attitude: "I am a poet. / I've wiped out the differences / between faces like mine and those of strangers" (1958, p. 27). Here, Mayakovsky establishes himself as the culmination of the many perspectives and affective dispositions represented by the various characters on the stage. He frames himself as a suffering messianic figure and pleads the audience for compassion. He wants the audience to remember these moments of chaos and internal resistance. He is going to proudly declare himself as "Vladimir Mayakovsky" at the end of the play and before he "wipes out the differences" between the characters, his various creations, he wants to record the internal resistance of the artwork. He wants the various internal contradictions, tensions, and resistances to inhere in the final product and survive its commodification in the eyes of consumerist spectators.

The most striking aspect of the language of this *Tragedy* is the amount of mechanical imagery, language and sounds it produces to reinforce this ongoing idea of production. The repetition of harsh consonants, the brutal metaphors, the aggressive typescript, and Burliuk's fragmented illustrations contribute to the mechanization of Mayakovsky's tragedy. The poet is aware of his power to "wipe out the differences" through his verse or through fashioning himself as a prophetic voice which can spiritualize and transcend the various modes of confrontation with everyday objects as illustrated by his characters. Hence, Mayakovsky grows agitated whenever he finds himself subscribing to a specific set of expectations and performing in line with the public's expectations of that identity category. Therefore, while announcing himself "a poet," he uses a dash to problematize this association and to emphasize the provisional nature of this assignment.

The final scene offers a dazzling mixture of constructive and destructive attitudes toward the artwork. On one hand, Mayakovsky stages this political drama between the different parts of himself to record the internal tensions and contradictions which hold the work together. On the other hand, he is nervous to end the performance in such an open and vulnerable state because that would entail yielding authority to the spectators who have been repeatedly incriminated throughout the play in as the source of the poet's anguish. As a result, the contradictory attitudes prevailing in this final stretch establish a dialectic between different notions of creative authority.

Accordingly, in the last scene of *A Tragedy,* Mayakovsky gets enough of the endless complaining and revolt on the stage, and now rebels against his own characters, "Listen! I can't stand it! It's all right for you. But what about me, with my pain?" (1968, p. 36). His remarks are answered by "threatening voices," which say that if he continues talking, they will eat him "like a rabbit" (1968, p. 36). The Old Man with One Shorn Cat praises him, "You are the only one who can sing songs. Take them away to your pretty God!" (1968, p. 36). As he pleads to Mayakovsky, he "points to the pile of tears" (1968, p. 36). Everyone offers a tear to Mayakovsky, who, in turn, collects them to put in his suitcase before leaving the stage. This mournful ceremony resembles a

ritual of sacrifice and Mayakovsky becomes established as a messianic figure who is capable of the lyric and musical energy that can redeem this chaotic performance.

Through this exchange of tears, Mayakovsky also offers a parody of the hyperbolic tenor and melodramatic mode of the entire work. He situates his play in the larger historical tradition of tragedies by subverting the conventional cathartic experience into a commodified artificial exchange between the characters. If we read this final ceremony as a ritualistic sacrifice, what does it mean that the characters offer their tears to Mayakovsky? One possible interpretation is that characters sacrifice themselves because they recognize the impossibility of maintaining an individuality under the looming presence of such an overpowering messianic figure. They can sing no more; they cannot continue to have individual voices. However, Mayakovsky's reaction is unexpected: He does not respond proudly like a "pampered Greek" God, instead he talks about his "tattered soul." He anticipates the suffering that carrying a suitcase filled with tears will eventually cause him.

The poet wants to audience to be aware, even at the end of the performance, that he, in trying to be a single self, suffers and leaves the stage with a "tattered soul" (1968, p. 36). Just as the individual characters submit to the large poetic ego at the center of the stage, the poet realizes the impossibility of gathering them under one coherent subjectivity. Thus, the play ends on a destructive note, where Mayakovsky declares that he will "throw" away the "tears to the dark god of storms, at the source of bestial faiths" (1968, p. 37). This ending illustrates the problems with attempting to define a coherent poetic subjectivity, with packing all the different aspects of his psyche as enacted by these characters on the stage into one suitcase. Mayakovsky has laid out the process of his own "production," and he leaves by reminding the audience that his singing does not indicate the realization of a singular and coherent dramatic self.

The destructive urge in the final scene stands in stark contrast to the Epilogue, recited by Mayakovsky himself, who now introduces the metaphor of breastfeeding. "It's too bad I had no bosom: I'd have fed all of you, like a sweet little old nanny. But right now I'm a bit dried up" (1968, p. 38). The disquiet and torment from the previous scene have left the poet in an unproductive state: He is not able to feed the audience anymore. This hopeless submission is turned on its head at the end of the epilogue, where, as Victor Erlich shows, Mayakovsky "refuses to close on the note of 'infinite anguish.' The epilogue undercuts the nearly unbearable effect in a sequence where nonchalant condescension is succeeded by boastful blasphemy and, finally, by poking fun at one's own self-absorption" (Erlich, p. 46). Erlich then compares this gesture to the turn at the end of Gogol's "A Madman's Diary," where the protagonist abandons his desperate calls for help and asks about the wart on the Bey of Algiers's nose. Erlich's comparison of this scene to the Gogolian gesture of returning to a self-adorned reality reveals the extent to which the poet is concerned with his public reception. He is scared to leave the stage in a fragmented, incomplete, and "tattered" condition. So, he swiftly turns to a complacent and playful tone, and tries to cover up his plight. Mayakovsky calls God "a thief" at the end: "It was I / who stuck my finger into the sky" (1968, p. 38). This line has double meaning – it refers to the simple act of raising one's finger to make a determined declaration but also to interrupting the divine order. The poet's desire references to

breastfeeding and later rebellion against God suggest a procreative urge. In fact, he leaves the stage by boastfully pronouncing his own name.

In his 1925 poem "Homeward!" Mayakovsky writes, "I myself / feel like a Soviet / factory / manufacturing happiness. / I object / to being torn up / like a flower of the field / after a long day's work" (1970, p. 187). Here, the poet compares writing and exercising emotions to the mechanical work of a machine. The poem features many sharp enjambments in Mayakovsky's signature ladder-style and conveys the sense of mechanical work. By likening his emotive engagement to the work of a Soviet factory, Mayakovsky conveys the sense of automatization that undergirds his poetic production. The flower metaphor establishes a relationship to objects similar to that of his interaction with the props in *A Tragedy.* A plucked flower is separated from its roots and begins to serve a particular purpose. In the original Russian, the word for "plucking" (рвали) (1970, p. 186) takes up a single line and the strong "r" sound in the beginning underlines the brutality of the activity described. Mayakovsky's wish not "to be torn up like a flower" once again illustrates his fear of the final aesthetic product eclipsing the physical and mental anguish of the creative process, as well as of being turned into an artistic commodity.

By dramatizing the plucking gesture, Mayakovsky also demands a level of self-consciousness from the readers: As readers utter the individual words of the poem, or as they single out a poem from a larger collection held together by a strong narrative impulse, the readers should be conscious the violence of the gesture. After all, it is this very gesture that might overshadow the poet's struggle for a coherent or unified subjectivity. Yet, in *A Tragedy,* the metonymic separation of his body and psyche into various characters is ultimately the epitome of a self-inflicted shattering of the poet's subjectivity. Therefore, Mayakovsky's fear of division and desire for unity serve as the wheels of a performative dialectic. His urge to transform the ordinary and the everyday produces a fear that his very own subjectivity might have to endure similar ruptures and transformations.

MARINA TSVETAEVA'S "DESK"

Like Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva problematizes the relationship between subjectivity and everyday life. However, where Mayakovsky constructs a melodramatic political theater and divided himself into different metonymic projections, Tsvetaeva situates the body in various threshold positions where it can mirror or reflect the everyday toils of the creative process back to the poet. These threshold positions include the narratives of dawn, insomniac states, motherhood, train rides, devotional struggles, and the moment of artistic creation. Therefore, in Tsvetaeva's poetry, rather than the distribution of body across space, the trope of division becomes central. In Tsvetaeva, the distance between the self and the objects which witness its everyday struggles becomes the dynamic space of lyric utterance.

The richness of Tsvetaeva's poetry in metaphor and apostrophe is reflective of a struggle to collapse the distance between the self and these quotidian witnesses of the self. Metaphor stages momentary unities between disparate concepts and apostrophe conveys a sense of longing toward the other, a desire to usher the other into the lyric present. However, Tsvetaeva often transitions

with such breathtaking pace between metaphors and apostrophes that she highlights urgency of this encounter as well as her reluctance to give the object a concrete and durable presence in the poetic imagination. In other words, the desire to usher the object is paradoxically undermined by the metaphorical drive which affords objects evasive and conceptual presence in language. Here is a good example: A 1918 poem which describes poems through various culturally charged metaphors:

> Every poem is a child of love,
> A waif born illegitimately.
> A first-born, set at the mercy of
> The wind, beside the railway.
>
> For the heart, both altar and hell.
> For the heart, both heaven and grief
> The father? Maybe a tsar, who can tell,
> A tsar, or maybe a thief. (1987, p. 41).

The first thing to notice here is the poem's self-conscious effort to describe what a poem is. Though the speaker could think about what a poem is through its parts, she resists the blazon, instead nominating a variety of metaphors with vastly different gendered and cultural implications to answer the question: What is a poem? In so doing, the poet calls attention to the power of cultural discourse in adjusting readerly orientations around a poem. However, despite its metaphorical plentitude, the poem still manages to foreground the more intricate questions: How does a poem speak? How does a poem mean? When examined carefully, the poem contains many rhetorical tensions and formal devices which disturb its metaphorical drive. The one-line statements of the first two lines give way to an enjambed third line where the description now also provides a setting. The setting initially carries possible Biblical associations, though it quickly situates the helpless "first-born" and the reader "beside the railway."

Later, in the second stanza, the religious or spiritual undertone becomes obvious. But the context remains slippery because after the crowning of the religious associations with the reference to "the father," the poem invites a political metaphor: "a tsar." Most importantly, despite the ambivalence of the poem's metaphorical ground, the poetic voice manages to entertain performative inflections. In other words, especially in the final lines of the poem, the declarative mode becomes replaced by a more contemplative and provisional relation to metaphor: "Maybe a tsar, who can tell, maybe a tsar." This shift in poetic voice and its meditative relaxation ere are quite ironic because the final lines offer a metaphor which connotes male authority and political power. Precisely because the poetic voice finds performative release and manages to break the authority of metaphor, the final lines offer the strongest answer to the poem's initial inquiry: Poetry is a place where, even while writing under the sign of authority, the utterance can liberate itself from the claims of autonomy. Pamela Chester offers an intriguing account of the duality in Tsvetaeva's poetic gestures: "Tsvetaeva constantly exploited the tension between voice and silence, between the lyric gift of the poet and the stifling forces of society, between women poets and male

readers, between what Boym calls the poet and the poetess within herself, between the "masculine" symbolic realm and the "feminine" literal or semiotic which is prior to language" (1994, p. 1035).

However, in Tsvetaeva's more lyric poems, these dualities perpetuated by the metaphorical drive are often collapsed through an emphasis on poetic utterance and a spiritualization of poetic language. As Sibbelan Forrester observes, "What appears at first reading to be merely duality is multiplied by the complexity of associations and by the vertical convergence, typical of Tsvetaeva's poetics, in which heaven and hell, God and devil are separated by no more than a breath" (1992, p. 242). While thinking about Tsvetaeva's ability to maintain dualities and to collapse them through the deliverances of poetic utterance, it is especially important to foreground the way in which Tsvetaeva folds metaphors into her apostrophes. While metaphor asserts likeness between two disparate entities, apostrophe ushers an object into the present of poetic utterance. As a result, despite the multiplicity of associations and affective ambivalences at the heart of Tsvetaeva's poetry, the poem keeps returning to or restaging the moment of encounter with the other.

In addition to the social, societal, or ethical implications we might draw from this insistence, the apostrophe demands radical examinations of the poet's own subjectivity. After all, apostrophizing another entity reveals the manner of the poet's reaching out to the other, as well as offering important insights into the nature and urgency of the speaker's own desires. "Desk" is an ode to honor the poet's desk, the surface upon which the creative process takes place. By reconstructing her creative process through the desk, Tsvetaeva aims visualize her own body as a surface upon which ideologies, societal pressures, expectations, and aesthetic anxieties get inscribed. The poem was composed over several months in 1933 and Tsvetaeva had already lived in Paris for eight years then. Her poem addresses larger problems about living and writing away from Russian, poverty, and gender.

For the purposes of the paper, it is important to note that Tsvetaeva was an avid reader of Mayakovsky. Her poetry reflects certain aspects of his transfiguring and fierce style, especially in how she transforms everyday objects into rebellious units capable of undermining the creator's hold over the artistic work. In "Desk," she moves swiftly between metaphors and exclamations. Her direct address to the desk is passionate, her meter resolute, and many of her images violent. It is possible to relate the rebellious tone in Tsvetaeva's poem to her political journey. In his biography of Tsvetaeva, Simon Karlinsky writes, "Her youthful revolutionary sympathies were directed towards an anarchist revolution, not a Liberal Democratic one, let alone Marxist. While she had left those sympathies behind by the time she turned sixteen, the ideal of rebellion remained. But it was an individualistic and heroic rebellion" (1985, p. 67).

Karlinsky's biography also demonstrates the importance of the desk as an object in Tsvetaeva's artistic journey: "Asked by one of the Russian newspapers about her wishes for 1926, Tsvetaeva responded: 'For myself – a separate room and a writing desk, for Russia – whatever she herself wants" (1985, p. 151). "Desk," written almost seven years after this statement, opens with the speaker expressing her gratitude to the desk for accompanying her in her journey and "protecting" her "like a scar" (1987, p. 93). In the Russian, the phrase "like a scar" is preceded by a

dash. Tsvetaeva, like Emily Dickinson, is generous in her use of the dash. In this case, the pause occasioned by the dash allows a more concentrated space for this protective scar metaphor. The logic behind the metaphor is ambivalent, on both grammatical and conceptual levels given the ambivalence of the association between a "scar" and the act of "protection." The two translations of the poem into English convey this complexity: In Feinstein's translation, "My scar and my protection," (1981, p. 88) preserves the apostrophic drive and the ambiguity between the exact nature of the association between the two ascriptions. McDuff connects the two with a firmer syntax, "Protecting me like a scar" (1987, p. 93), making the association even more urgent and complex, since a scar is usually not regarded as a source of protection. On the contrary, it is that which requires protection. McDuff's translation also leaves an ambiguity regarding the precise referent of the scar: Though it likely refers to the act of protection, it might also be the object of protection, as in 'preserving me like one preserves a scar.'

The ambiguity in McDuff's translation brings to the foreground an important aspect of Tsvetaeva's handling of the metaphorical and metonymic axes of language. Though the "scar" image here is presented as a metaphor, it immediately establishes a metonymic thread based on body, embodiment, and physical injury, which recurs throughout the poem. Indeed, as I will show later, the scar image returns in the final sections of the poem as part of the speaker's apostrophic gestures towards the desk. Why is the importance of the metonymic representation of the scar here? Even though it may be associated with the desk, the scar is a projection of the physical and emotional wounds carried by the speaker, which are then inscribed on the desk through the act of writing poetry. Therefore, with this image, the poem creates a mimetic link between the poet's own body and the surface upon which the act of writing take and poetic creation take place. It also provides insights into the links between writing as a concrete act which supersedes physical surfaces and renders all protective layers tenuous: Just as the writing materials or papers do not prevent the desk from absorbing the mechanical shocks and gestures of the writing process, the physical body catalogues the various injuries inflicted on the individual psyche.

In the third stanza, the speaker uses a mirror metaphor to establish the kind of self-division facilitated by the desk. "Mirror of great severity! / Thank you for getting in the way / (Threshold to worldly ploys) / Of all of my life's joys" (1987, p. 93). The use of the genitive case in the first line introduces a comparison (Строжайшее из зерцал!) (2013, p. 118). What receives emphasis here is not the adjective (strictest, the most severe) but the fact that it is the most severe of mirrors. Why does this mirror stand out? It is intimate and as Alyssa Dinega points out, "genderless," (2001, p. 221) so it allows the speaker to remove her social masks. This, then, is a constructive relationship allowing the speaker to obtain a glimpse of the severest and clearest vision of herself. However, the last three lines of the stanza introduce a paradox. The desk can achieve this kind of mirroring effect because it also pushes the speaker into further alienation and solitude. The third line is a smart play on this paradox: The phrase "threshold to worldly ploys" refers back to the mirror/desk, however it also delays the enjambment to the fourth line (in the way/of all my life's joys) (1987, p. 93). This is a mimetic shift; the line is literally getting "in the way of all [her] life's joys," of her verse. It interrupts the flow of her verse, the continuity of her voice, and in so doing, it

becomes the 'strictest' mirror: It both reflects the toils of an artistic mind and forces the speaker to pause and contemplate the reflection.

The speaker maintains a reverential and intimate tone while addressing the desk, however, rather than asserting a relation of mutuality among two equals, the poem stages episodes both of vulnerability and authority over the desk. This dialectic is somewhat similar to Mayakovsky's refusal to establish a singular political attitude toward the various and dissenting metonymic extensions of his own body. Alyssa Dinega has argued that the desk offers Tsvetaeva the ideal lover with its "very merging of alterity and autonomy" and so the "only possible poetic equal" (2001, p. 222). This feeling mutuality emerges from the complex dialectic negotiations sustained throughout the poem, where the speaker variously loses and assumes control over it. This fluctuating power dynamic also provides insights into the complex affective balances of the creative process. For example, the eighth and the ninth stanzas depict this askew power dynamic:

"A fugitive.
'Back to your chair.'
Thank you - you steered me with care
Away from unlasting joys
Like a hypnotist magus his

Somnambulist.
Table, you made
My battle-scars a balustrade
Of fire: crimson of veins.
Column of deeds and pains" (1987, p. 94).

In the Russian, the word for "steering" is "to bend. Unlike David McDuff in the above translation, Feinstein renders the phrase as "bent my life away" (1981, p. 88). The desk brings the fugitive back and locks her in a bent position before itself. The desk's ability to orient the speaker is likened to a hypnotist's ability to control a "somnambulist." The image of a sleepwalker is mirrored by the walking, iambic rhythm of these lines. The quatrain arrangement is also disoriented in this section as the poet uses five-line stanzas. Therefore, the poem walks with a rhythm similar to that of a somnambulist. By using the formal organization of the poem to create mimetic visual surfaces sustains the metonymic complexity structuring the entire poem. Just as the speaker regards the surface of the desk at once as autonomous entity and a projection of her own psyche, the reader is invited to contemplate the surface of the poem (its meter and stanzaic structure) as an extension of the poem's psychological and emotional drama.

More importantly, this metonymic organization also establishes the connection between the poetic surface and the body, which remains central to Tsvetaeva's poetry throughout her career. Reading a poem, especially one that is continuously energized by apostrophic gestures, can be regarded as an externalizing act, where the words are thrown to dramatize a voice, where words are directed *at* an audience. However, the lyric is also a solitary and introspective mode where poetic utterance is equally oriented inward and self-directed. As a result, in Tsvetaeva's lyric world, the poem is not only meant to be read to get the words out there, but it is a struggle that is

directed at and registered on the speaking body. Hence, in the final stanzas of this first section, the proliferates in metonymic chains, often referring to the different parts of the body: "lips," "shoulder," "knee," "brow," "breast."

It is important to note, however, that much of the richness and ambivalence of Tsvetaeva's poetic maneuvers owes to the radical dependence she creates between the metaphorical and metonymic modes. For example, the various references to body parts here are always framed through metaphorical language. The speaker sees her "battle-scars" on the table. The "scar" metaphor from the first stanza has turned into a physical mark on the desk, which then turns into "a balustrade of fire," and then "to crimson veins," and finally to a "column of deeds and pains" (Tsvetaeva, 1987, p. 94). The fire and the crimson color refer to the wood from which the desk was made. The raw material for the desk is likened to the veins of the speaker, as if they provide blood and vitality to the desk. Here, the speaker's body merges with the table. Just as the speaker records traces of her labor and the production of her aesthetic consciousness, she also provides an account of the labor behind the desk's production. This consciousness stands contrary to the fetishistic impulse described in Marx's account of commodities: "The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, everyday thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent" (Marx, 2011, p. 82). The speaker does not simply develop a sensuous connection to the wood and spiritualize its significance as a product. Rather, she creates an almost an intersectional alliance with the object, foregrounding the radical connection between their processes of production.

Although Tsvetaeva's metonymic and constructivist presentation of the desk recalls Mayakovsky's transfiguring descriptive practices, there is an important difference between the two poets. Tora Lane describes this essential difference between the two poets in her analysis of Tsvetaeva's "Staircase": "If Majakovskij constantly merges things with people in hyperbolic images as a means of escaping or attacking conventional categories, Cvetaeva gradually develops the idea of the fusion of things and people by emphasizing the elemental nature behind all categories of being and their ability to break out of the prevailing order" (2013, p. 600). Mayakovsky's transfigurations are spontaneous and immediate, neither requiring sustained interactions nor a drawn-out temporality. An adjective (crooked, crucified) quickly disturbs the conventional definition of a thing and shocks it away from its original context and meaning. In Tsvetaeva's poem, the association with the desk takes the speaker all the way to the desk's origins, making dutiful references to the raw material. Rather than launching a swift metaphor to disfigure the desk and subjectify its significance, Tsvetaeva's speaker pursues a more radical mimetic dependence between the body, the desk's surface, and the poetic surface. Tsvetaeva's relationship with everyday objects is therefore more gradual and intimate.

The speaker deepens this connection by representing the everyday conditions behind poetic creation and situating the desk as an agent in her creative landscape. In the second section of the poem, the speaker addresses the desk to establish the role it plays in creating the urgency and necessity for the creative act:

Table, hurling money and letters
The mailman brings, into the fray.
Insisting that the deadline
For every line is today. (1987, p. 95)

The desk is represented here as both a surface which assembles the everyday and as an agentic object that clears space for aesthetic labor, even assuming a demanding attitude toward the poet. Social reality and the taxing necessities of quotidian life are not completely left out of the lyric space. In fact, they are very much a part of the lyric surface, simultaneously delaying the poem and claiming spaces in it. Tsvetaeva refuses to privilege lyric space as a pristine surface which ought to be separated from the toils of everyday life. The space-clearing gestures which are necessary for the execution of the creative act are represented in the poem, rather than representing the lyric as an abstract meditation that is severable from the everyday existence and physical labor of the poet. Although the stanza begins with an apostrophe directed at the object, the syntax quickly turns to what the object demands of the speaker herself. This not only grants considerable agency to the desk as part of the creative process, but it also positions poetic utterance in an ambiguous threshold. On one hand, poetic utterance, especially with the help of apostrophe, holds a ritual or spiritual power to make things present. For example, the second section repeatedly calls attention to the sense of presence established by the desk with the support of deictic markers (here, there): "Teaching there's no tomorrow, / That today is all there is here" (1987, p. 94). On the other hand, the poem calls attention to the inseparability of poetic utterance from the physical and material context out of which it stems.

As the intimacy and mirroring relationship between the speaker and the desk grows, the question of creative authority gets blurrier. Normative structures of power and authority run out of steam and Tsvetaeva's speakers negotiates with religious language to pursue alternative manners of spiritualizing language, poetic labor, and everyday life. Is it possible to identify a spiritual potential in the brutal and agonizing processes of poetic creation? In the third section, the speaker once again turns to metonymic language, tracing connections between the body and the marks produced on the surface of the desk during the creative process:

The thirtieth anniversary
Of our union. Get back, knaves!
I know your every wrinkle,
Your flaws, your toothmarks, and grooves,

The slightest of your notches
(Made with *teeth* if I failed in my task).
Yes, a fellow creature was loved,
And this creature was - a desk" (1987, p. 95).

Tsvetaeva uses internal rhymes to reflect the sensuous experience of the desk's surface. "Wrinkles," "flaws," "toothmarks," "grooves" all represent the intimacy of the mirroring relationship between the speaker and the desk. Such material and, at times, grotesque representations of creative labor resemble the way Mayakovsky exposes his own physical and

psychic vulnerability in *A Tragedy*. Just as Mayakovsky wants the speaker's suffering to become visible to his audience, Tsvetaeva's also celebrates the marks of desperation that have been left on the desk over the years and the power of vulnerable exposure that the desk dutifully teaches to the poet. This calls attention not only to the radical dependence between the subject and the object, but also to the liberating power of poetic speech. The violent bursts of impatience and creation call attention to two surfaces. First, the surface of the desk which carries signs of physical toil behind the artistic process, and second, to the poet's teeth, where the poetic sounds pass through to find articulation. So, the reference to teeth is not only a candid representation of challenging creative conditions but also a statement of the brutal reality that the poem has to pass through to come into existence in the first place.

The desire to chew on and bite into objects is a motif that comes up in several other Tsvetaeva poems. Catherine Ciepiela shows how in "From the Sea" Tsvetaeva puts the "shells, stones, and other detritus… in her mouth. This gesture has striking psychological content, associating speech with an infant's urge to touch and ingest surrounding objects" (2006, p. 181). Likewise, in the above stanzas from the third section, poetic speech is insistent with an abundance of "y" and "z" sounds. These consonantal repetitions fall on the verbs which describe leaving toothmarks on the desk. Such self-consciousness relationship to poetic utterance and to the production of elemental sounds almost call to mind infant's battle with words. Just as the emphasis on teeth and verbal articulation concentrate the readers' attention on the surface of language, the evocation of a child's elemental relationship to language undermines the ceaseless metaphorical traffic within the poem. Per psychoanalytic accounts of language, whereas metaphors are always entangled in cultural discourse and symbolic representation, a child's play with language is more concrete and uninhibited by the shaping effects of discursive structures. The speaker's desire for intimacy with the desk, the process of melting the inherent otherness of this everyday object, requires her to relate to it with a consciousness that is less mediated by culture. In fact, at the end of the stanza, she repeats "creature" twice in reference to the desk. This reference works as both an emblem of alterity and a desire to reinforce an almost primitive sense of the connection shared between the object and the subject.

In the final stanzas of the third section, Tsvetaeva brings out the spiritual and devotional dynamics that have been building up through her expression of the desire for unity. Tsvetaeva typically supplements her descriptions of the material conditions of her workspace and creative labor with religious diction. For example, her neighbor Yelena Izvolskaya remembers Tsvetaeva saying, "life hurls me back into my monastic cell, to my writing desk, to creativity" (quoted in Feiler p. 183). We find a similar invocation of religious settings and devotional practices in "Desk":

> And the church porch? The circular well-rim?
> The smooth pellicle of the grave?
> If only my two elbows
> Would always say: God will give,
>
> God *is.* The poet's inventive,
> The world's his table, his altar and throne.

But better than all, most enduring
Are you – table scarred by my pen.

Like in the previously quoted sections from the poem, these stanzas are rife with metaphorical associations, as the speaker travels through different settings and objects. Toward the end of the first stanza, however, the speaker reflects on her own posture and bodily alignment. Her disciplined and concentrated posture intimates a devotional attitude. Perhaps the hands and the elbows are free in space, invoking God and trying to make him present to the mind through prayer. Indeed, a description of this posture is followed by a reference to God and an affirmation of his presence. "God *is*." But her posture and physical labor does not always align with this affirmative attitude. The labor behind poetic creation requires that the elbows rest on the desk for hours on end and to turn this concrete working space into an altar. The labor of writing poetry and the hours spent before the desk constitute the crux of the poet's devotional practice.

Hence, toward the end of this section, the speaker reorients devotional language to affirm the desk as the figure of divine authority: "Most enduring / Are you." Rather than ending on a note of an incorporeal spirituality or divination, however, the speaker returns us to the reality of her setting and foregrounds the desk in its concreteness. Whereas the devotional quality of the earlier lines may have positioned her as the subject before a Creator, here she calls attention how her physical toil has partaken in the creation of the desk as well as the sense of spiritual sublimity associated with the object. In addition, the scar image from the first stanza returns, but this time without the metaphorical "like." Without the metaphorical framing, the reference to the scar further consolidates the now inseparable and embodied intimacy between the object and the subject.

In the final section of the poem, translated recently by Ilya Kaminsky and Jean Valentine, the poem ends with the speaker's portrayal of her own demise: "And I will be laid out bare / with only two wings to cover me" (2012, p. 565). Unlike the earlier sections where the speaker positions herself before the desk, here we get an imaginary representation of the poet's own body. Even here, however, the metaphorical language – "with only two wings to cover me" – recalls the earlier representations of the speaker's posture. Now, rather than the poet's hands or elbows resting or working on the desk, the speaker's imagined dead body is covered with "two wings." In addition to furthering the bodily association between the speaker and the desk, these lines also encapsulate the complex status of spiritual discourse in Tsvetaeva's poetry. The wing metaphor suggests an underlying spiritual dynamic mediating the concrete and metonymic associations between the two bodies. Like in the rest of the poem, the speaker's mirroring portrayals of the two bodies is held together by metaphors that reveal the potential stored in this intimacy for designating new forms of lyric spirituality.

The tone of Tsvetaeva's funereal ending differs from Mayakovsky's mass-ritualistic setting and prophetic pronouncements. Both poets represent the constitution of a poetic persona through recourse to religious and spiritual discourse. In Mayakovsky, however, this happens through the staging of political and revolutionary tension between the poet as well as the metonymic extensions of the poet's body and psyche across an urban landscape. In *The Tears of Things*, Peter

Schwenger writes, "[p]hysical things in the world may be enlisted in a narcissistic project of self-constitution, making the subject into the seen and therefore ratifying its existence in the world" (2006, p. 48). Though this narcissism is indeed a part of Mayakovsky's performative apparatus, his dramatic encounters with everyday objects ultimately work to break the illusory autonomy of the ego. In her comparative analysis of the two poets, Svetlana Boym observes that Tsvetaeva refuses to create a single, totalizing figure of the poetess, neither a sympathetic one nor a caricature" (1991, p. 205). Where Mayakovsky's play is a public and urban performance melodramatizing the cathartic structure of a Greek tragedy and extending the parts of self into the political context of a modern polis, Tsvetaeva's poetry offers sustained, intimate, and solitary examinations of the complex co-dependence that she cultivates with everyday objects.

In "Desk," Tsvetaeva constructs the poetic self through a sustained engagement with a singular object. In addition to being the surface upon and through which the poet authors herself into existence, the desk becomes an indelible witness to the toil and labor of the creative process. Despite these differences, both poets recognize that the transfiguration of the everyday entails establishing multiple centers of subjectivity, rendering the notion of a coherent and autonomous self inconceivable. In other words, their works demonstrate a struggle to assemble the different parts of this dispersed subjectivity. As they address and forge alliances with the intimate witnesses of the artistic process, they also transform the audience's expectations of a coherent lyric voice and poetic self. Perhaps Tsvetaeva's commentary on Mayakovsky's style in "Epic and Lyric of Contemporary Russia" offers the most powerful expression of their shared sensibilities and stylistic differences:

> "Take Mayakovsky's prose: that same contracted muscle of verse… What is said of Mayakovsky is what I've said about myself.
> I take aim at the word.
> And with the word I take aim at the object, with the object I take aim at the reader" (1992, p. 117).

CONCLUSION

I wish to conclude by quoting once again from Tsvetaeva's essay which gets to the heart of the distinctions between the two poets: "Mayakovsky at a writing-desk is a physical incongruity" (1992, p. 125). Tsvetaeva describes the impossibility of imagining Mayakovsky in a setting which, in her own work, embodies intense creative and artistic tension. The idea of placing Mayakovsky in such a private and concentrated setting proves contradictory not only due his expansive and boisterous style but also because, according to Tsvetaeva, Mayakovsky tends to reverse the more traditional routes of poetic representation: Unlike many poets who go "from the physical into the psychical," Mayakovsky goes "from the psychical into the physical… for Mayakovsky, unlike all poets, *word* was body" (1992, p. 125). Tsvetaeva calls attention to the pervasive metonymic logic which undergirds much of Mayakovsky's poetic and dramatic style, with frequent apostrophic gestures calling attention to the embodied projections of poetic voice. At times, his utterances are so concentrated, with single words taking up entire lines, that the linguistic effort and the bodily

performance feel almost inseparable. Each word and utterance come stamped with bodily and mental suffering.

Nonetheless, the metonymic logic in Mayakvosky is not restricted to the words bearing signs of their bodily origins. Mayakovsky also creates riotous political theaters where the autonomy of the poet over his creation can be called into question. Through the metonymic distribution of his own body and psyche across the characters, Mayakovsky 'deauthorizes' his own poetic authority and public identity, provocatively calling into question cultural perceptions of a poet as a unified figure. The emergence of such demands for artistic unity is inevitable and Mayakovsky acknowledges this in the sacrificial ritual at the end of *A Tragedy* when he receives tears from each character and puts them into a single suitcase. However, the characters – which are extensions of the poet's various physical and psychical features – are not the only engines of insurrection throughout the play. Just as they disturb the poet's authority, they, in turn, find their own authorities disturbed by quotidian objects which they must rely on to communicate their identities to the audience. This dependence is often hyperbolically depicted because characters literally walk onto the stage carrying objects that convey the part they are supposed to act. Thus, throughout the tragedy, political tensions emerge between characters and everyday objects which constitute *byt*, that sense of conservative stagnation that is built into the texture of everyday life. Despite the organic and profound affinity between the word and the body in Mayakovsky, there is also a continuous attempt to decentralize authorial power. A revolutionary reconstruction of *byt* requires thorough reexaminations of the mutually constitutive dynamics between subjectivity and everyday life: the construction of the quotidian by the poet as well as the construction of poetic subjectivity by the everyday circumstances which create a desire for aesthetic transfiguration in the first place.

In Tsvetaeva, the negotiation with *byt* prompts similar political undertones, dialectical maneuvers, and constructivist strategies. However, the drama is more focused and less dispersed. Rather than distributing her physical and psychic existence across a multiplicity of characters and objects, Tsvetaeva foregrounds the intersubjective dynamics which emerge from the poet's private and intimate encounters with specific quotidian objects. The desk becomes an intimate witness of the strenuous creative process as well as an agentic presence, making demands of the poet. As their creative intimacy deepens, the poet's dependence on this everyday object grows to encompass a whole spectrum of affective states. At first, the poet infers the dynamics of her creative process from the marks that she has left on the desk. These marks do not merely 'chronicle' the creative process, however, they also turn into metonymic representations of the poet's own body, as Tsvetaeva begins to associate these marks with, for example, signs of physical injury or emotional scarring. More importantly, at times, these bodily signs start out as metaphors and then turn into metonymies for describing the desk's bodily surface. Like in Mayakovsky, these semiotic transfers call attention to the mutual constitutive relationship between poetic subjectivity and everyday life. As such, Tsvetaeva's relationship to the quotidian goes beyond the rebellious attitude that is conventionally associated with *byt*, the seemingly stagnant gaze or fossilized structure of everyday life. *Byt* becomes a more complicated and phenomenologically layered

entity, even adorned at times with spiritual or religious potential. Tsvetaeva also transfigures everyday objects to disturb idealized and gendered notions of authorship and to render the labor and the physical conditions behind artistic creation visible. However, unlike Mayakovsky, she does not represent this disturbance as a mass political spectacle where self-fashioning becomes inseparable from the cultivated habits and opinions of the masses. Instead, she examines the affective complexity which develops in our sustained efforts to cultivate intimacy with objects of the quotidian landscape.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor (2002). *Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor. New York: continuum.

Bahr, Hermann (1925). *Expressionism.* Trans. R.T. Gribble. London: Frank Henderson.

Baudrillard, Jean (1997). "The System of Collecting." *The Cultures of Collecting.* Ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal. London: Reaktion Books. 7-24.

Boym, Svetlana (1991). *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Boym, Svetlana (2018). "The Death of the Revoltionary Poet: Vladimir Mayakosky and Suicide as Literary Fact." *The Svetlana Boym Reader*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. 38-79.

Brown, Bill (2001). "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 28(1): 1-22.

Chester, Pamela (1994). "Engaging Sexual Demons in Marina Tsvetaeva's "Devil": The Body and the Genesis of the Woman Poet." *Slavic Review* 53 (4): 1025-1045.

Ciepiela, Ciepiela (2006). *The Same Solitude: Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Crone, Anna Lisa (2010). *Eros and Creativity in Russian Religious Renewal: The Philosophers and the Freudians.* Boston: Brill.

Dinega, Alyssa W. (2001). "Losing Rilke." *A Russian Psyche: The Poetic Mind of Marina Tsvetaeva.* Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.

Erlich, Viktor (1994). "The Futurist Rebellion." *Modernism and Revolution: Russian Literature in Transition.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. p. 32-56. Print.

Feiler, Lily (1994). *Marina Tsvetaeva: The Double Beat of Heaven and Hell*. Durham, Duke University Press.

Forrester, Sibelan (1992). "Bells and Cupolas: The Formative Role of the Female Body in Marina Tsvetaeva's Poetry." *Slavic Review* 51(2): 232-246.

Gallop, Jane (1985). "Metaphor and Metonymy." *Reading* Lacan. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 114-132.

Jakobson, Roman (1987). "On a Generation That Squandered its Poets." *Language in Literature.* Ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 273-300.

Jones, Emma R. (2010). "On the Life That is 'Never Simply Mine': Anonymity and Alterity in Merleau Ponty and Irigaray." *Phenomenology 2010: Selected Essays from North America.* Ed. Michael Barber, Lester Embree, and Thomas J. Nenon. Bucharest: Zeta Books. 271-284.

Karlinsky, Simon (1985). *Marina Tsvetaeva: The Woman, Her World, and Her Poetry.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Knapp, James A. and Jeffrey Pence (2003). "Between Thing and Theory." *Poetics Today* 24(4): 641-671.

Lane, Tora (2013). "The Poetry of Poverty: 'Poėma Lestnicy' by Marina Cvetaeva." *Russian Literature,* 73(4): 591-617.

Markov, Vladimir (1968). *Russian Futurism: A History.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Marx, Karl (2011). The Fetishism of Commodities and The Secret Thereof. *Capital: Volume One.* Dover. 81-95.

Mayakovsky, Vladimir (1914). "Владимир Маяковский: Трагедия." Moscow: Типолитография Т|Д И.Н.Грызунов и К°.

Mayakovsky, Vladimir (1968). "Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy." *Mayakovsky: Plays*. Trans. Guy Daniels. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 19-38.

Mayakovsky, Vladimir (1970). *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry*. Ed. Patricia Blake. Trans. Max Hayward and George Reavey. New York: The World Publishing Company.

Mayakovsky, Vladimir (2013). *Vladimir Mayakovsky: Selected Poems*. Trans. James H. McGavran III. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Mayakovsky, Vladimir (2018). *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy.* Trans. Paul Schmidt. Los Angeles: Green Integer.

McGavran III, James H. (2013). "Introduction." *Vladimir Mayakovsky: Selected Poems*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. xi-xxvi.

Payne, Robert (1995). "Introduction." *Mayakovsky: Plays*. Northwestern University Press. 1-18.

Rozanova, Olga (2000). "Cubism, Futurist, Suprematism." *Exploring Color: Olga Rozanova and the Early Russian Avant-Garde, 1910-1918.* Trans. Charles Rougle. New York: Routledge. 93-203.

Schwenger, Peter (2006). *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Stapanian, Juliette R. (1986). *Mayakovsky's Cubo-futurist Vision*. Houston: Rice University Press.

Sutcliffe, Benjamin M. (2009)**.** *The Prose of Life: Russian Women Writers from Khrushchev to Putin.* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Tsvetaeva, Marina (1992). "Epic and Lyric of Contemporary Russia: Vladimir Mayakovsky and Boris Pasternak." *Art in the Light of Conscience.* Trans. Angela Livingstone. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 87-129.

Tsvetaeva, Marina (2002). *Earthly Signs: Moscow Diaries, 1917-1922*. Trans. Jamey Gambrell. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Tsvetaeva, Marina (2012). "From 'The Desk'." *Poetry*, 199(6): 564-565.

Tsvetaeva, Marina (2013). "Стол." *Стихотворения. Поэмы.* Moscow: Дрофа, 117-121.

Tsvetayeva, Marina (1981). *Selected Poems of Marina Tsvetayeva*. Trans. Elaine Feinstein. New York: E.P. Dutton.

Tsvetayeva, Marina (1987). Selected Poems. Trans. David McDuff. Glasgow: Bloodaxe Books.

Warden, Claire (2015). *Modernist and Avant-Garden Performance: An Introduction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Zitzewitz, Josephine von (2008). "Marina Tsvetaeva." *The Facts on File Companion to World Poetry: 1900 to the* Present. Ed. R. Victoria Arana. New York: Facts on File. 449-450.

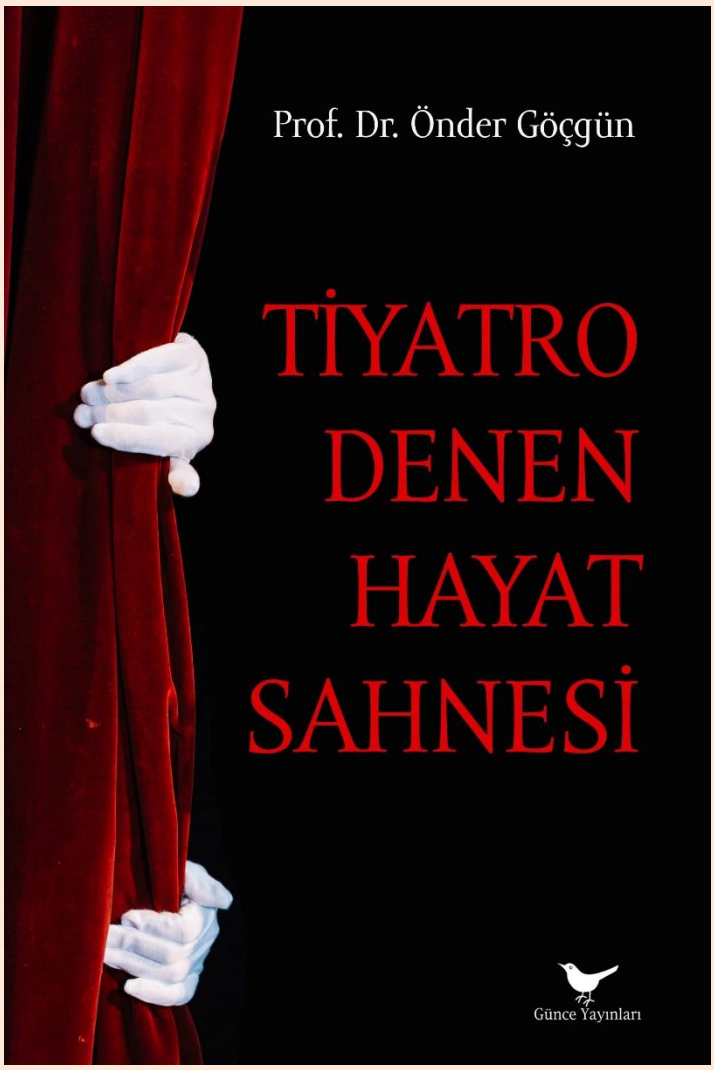
R

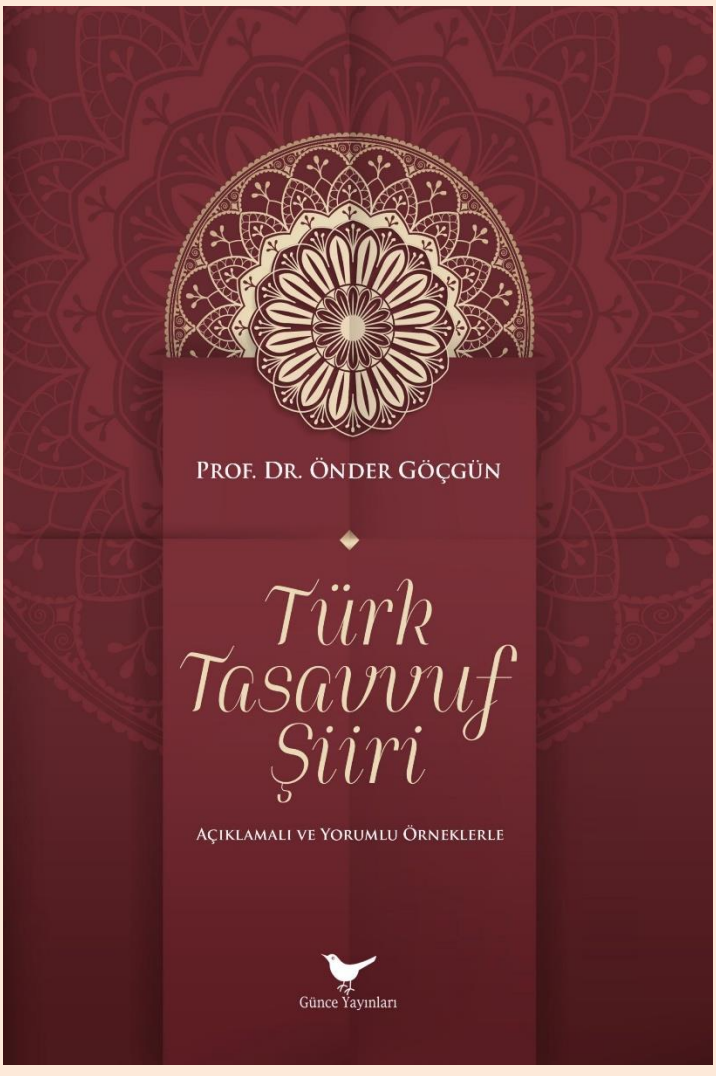
BATI EDEBİYATINDA AKIMLAR

editör
OKTAY YİVLİ

HATİCE FIRAT
YASEMİN MUMCU
OKTAY YİVLİ
OĞUZHAN KARABURGU
BERNA AKYÜZ SİZGEN
NİLÜFER İLHAN
ÜMMÜHAN TOPÇU
SEFA YÜCE
HANİFİ ASLAN
METİN AKYÜZ
MEHMET SÜMER
YAKUP ÖZTÜRK

Günce Yayınları





MODERN TÜRK EDEBİYATI

editör
OKTAY YİVLİ

MUHARREM DAYANÇ
OKTAY YİVLİ
MACİT BALIK
MAHMUT BABACAN
SEVİM ŞERMET
YASEMİN MUMCU
BEDİA KOÇAKOĞLU
NİLÜFER İLHAN
MAKSUT YİĞİTBAŞ
SELAMİ ALAN

Günce Yayınları